



ASSOCIATION FOR CONSUMER RESEARCH

Labovitz School of Business & Economics, University of Minnesota Duluth, 11 E. Superior Street, Suite 210, Duluth, MN 55802

Mood Repair For a Steal: the Effect of Social Exclusion on Shoplifting Intention

Christopher Ling, University of South Carolina, USA

Thomas Kramer, University of California Riverside, USA

We examine the effects of social exclusion on shoplifting and examine potential moderators. Results show that socially excluded consumers are more likely to shoplift and that this effect is moderated by the nature of the product (hedonic vs. utilitarian) and if consumers have shoplifted before.

[to cite]:

Christopher Ling and Thomas Kramer (2015) , "Mood Repair For a Steal: the Effect of Social Exclusion on Shoplifting Intention", in NA - Advances in Consumer Research Volume 43, eds. Kristin Diehl and Carolyn Yoon, Duluth, MN : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 615-616.

[url]:

<http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/1020005/volumes/v43/NA-43>

[copyright notice]:

This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at <http://www.copyright.com/>.

Mood Repair for a Steal: The Effect of Social Exclusion on Shoplifting Intention

Christopher Ling, University of South Carolina, USA
Thomas Kramer, University of California, Riverside, USA

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Shoplifting, the theft of merchandise from a retail establishment (Krasnovsky & Lane, 1998), is an extremely common crime with an astounding 60% of consumers admitting to shoplifting at least once in their lives (Kraut 1976; Ray 1987). Interestingly, an estimated 97% of shoplifters can be classified as “non-professionals,” stealing not out of financial need but for reasons related to social and personal pressures (National Learning & Resource Center 2006), which suggests that examining social influences, including social exclusion, has important theoretical and managerial implications. The focus of the current research is on how social exclusion can cause consumers to shoplift.

In this research, we argue and find that social exclusion increases consumers’ intention to shoplift. Our argument is consistent with prior work on social exclusion, which has shown that when re-affiliation is not possible, individuals will find other ways of coping with their feelings of rejection (DeWall and Bushman 2011; Poon, Chen, and DeWall 2013; Wan, Xu, and Ding 2014). We focus on how individuals may rely on shoplifting as a mechanism to cope with social exclusion. Consumers, hurt from social rejection, frequently find themselves in a retail environment where one potential form of aggressive behavior is likely to be shoplifting. We argue that social exclusion causes consumers to react in order to feel better and they may do so by shoplifting products.

In addition, this effect should be strengthened for those individuals who have shoplifted previously, as compared to those who have never shoplifted before. Past research has found that individuals who have shoplifted before differ in their opinions than non-shoplifters such that shoplifters tend to believe that they are unlikely to be caught compared to non-shoplifters (Tonglet 2002), suggesting that they would be relatively more comfortable with using shoplifting as a coping mechanism.

Previous research suggests that consumers do perceive shoplifting as a coping mechanism that will make them feel better. For example, some consumers regard shoplifting as a form of thrill seeking and hedonic consumption, one that they can use to lash out in ways that will make them feel better (Fullerton and Punj 1998; Kallis and Vanier 1985). We believe that this effect will also be moderated by the hedonic versus utilitarian nature of products. Specifically, consumers who are socially excluded should also have more desire for hedonic products which provides more emotional arousal, pleasure, and immediate benefits compared to utilitarian products (Okada 2005; Strahilevitz and Myers 1998).

Study 1 was a one-factor, (Social Acceptance: Inclusion vs. Exclusion) between-subjects design. Social acceptance was manipulated by having participants relive and write about a previous experience from their life (Maner et al. 2007). Next, in an ostensibly unrelated study, all participants were asked to imagine that they were alone in a department store with an opportunity to steal an iPod Touch worth about \$200. Shoplifting intention was then assessed with six 9-point scales ($\alpha = .96$) such as, “Indicate the likelihood that you would shoplift the iPod Touch.”

Results found the hypothesized effect of social exclusion controlling for age (Cox, Cox, and Moschis 1990) on shoplifting intention ($F(1, 59) = 6.33, p < .05$). Excluded participants expressed significantly higher shoplifting intention than included participants ($M_s = 2.63$ vs. 1.51).

Study 2 was a 2 (Social Acceptance: Inclusion vs. Exclusion) \times 2 (Shoplifted Before: Yes vs. No) between-subjects design with social acceptance manipulated and with past shoplifting behavior measured. Social acceptance was manipulated using the Cyberball game (Williams and Jarvis 2006). Next in an ostensibly unrelated study, all participants were instructed to imagine that they were alone in a department store with an opportunity to steal a pair of jeans worth about \$150.

A 2 (Social Acceptance: Social Inclusion vs. Social Exclusion) \times 2 (Shoplift Before: Yes vs. No) ANCOVA on shoplifting intention, controlling for age, was significant ($F(1,77) = 6.11, p < .05$). Planned contrasts revealed that when participants had shoplifted before, they were marginally more likely to express intention to shoplift after experiencing social exclusion versus inclusion ($M_s = 2.98$ vs. 1.89 ; $F(1,26) = 2.93, p < .1$).

The objective of study 3 was to test for the moderating role of product type on the effect of social exclusion on shoplifting intentions. Participants first completed the same Cyberball manipulation that was used in study 2. Next, we presented participants with the same shoplifting scenario as studies 1 and 2; however we also manipulated whether the product was framed to be hedonic or utilitarian.

Results found the hypothesized social acceptance \times shoplifted before \times product type interaction ($F(1, 193) = 4.75, p < .05$). For participants who had shoplifted before, the product type \times social acceptance interaction was significant ($F(1, 74) = 4.11, p < .05$), such that socially-excluded participants reported higher shoplifting intention for the hedonic than utilitarian athletic shoe ($M_s = 2.04$ vs. 1.28 ; $F(1,41) = 3.75, p = .06$).

Study 4 replicated our findings from study 3 manipulating product type by using two different product categories, instead of a framing manipulation. In addition, this study provided process evidence for shoplifting as a perceived mood repair mechanism. Participants first completed the same social acceptance manipulation from study 1. Next, we presented participants with the same shoplifting scenario previously used and we manipulated whether the target option was a hedonic or utilitarian product.

A 2 (Social Acceptance: Social Inclusion vs. Social Exclusion) \times 2 (Shoplift Before: Yes vs. No) \times 2 (Product Type: Hedonic vs. Utilitarian) ANCOVA on shoplifting intention controlling for age was significant ($F(1,362) = 7.88, p < .01$). Planned contrasts revealed that for the hedonic product, after social exclusion, participants were significantly more likely to express shoplifting intention if they had shoplifted before than if they had never shoplifted before ($M_s = 2.15$ vs. 1.24 ; $F(1,101) = 11.58, p < .001$).

Next, we tested for moderated mediation with the mediator of shoplifting as perceived mood repair using model 12 from the PROCESS macro (Hayes 2013). The index of moderated mediation was significant (95% CI: .17, 2.01) providing evidence of moderated mediation (Hayes 2015).

REFERENCES

- Cox, Dena, Anthony D. Cox, and George P. Moschis (1990), “When Consumer Behavior Goes Bad: An Investigation of Adolescent Shoplifting,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17(2), 149–59.
- DeWall, C. N. and Brad J. Bushman (2011), “Social Acceptance and Rejection: The Sweet and the Bitter,” *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 20(4), 256–60.

- Fullerton, Ronald A. and Girish Punj (1998), "The Unintended Consequences of the Culture of Consumption: An Historical-Theoretical Analysis of Consumer Misbehavior," *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 1(4), 393–423.
- Gu, FF, Namwoon Kim, DK Tse, and D.T. Wang (2010), "Managing Distributors' Changing Motivations over the Course of a Joint Sales Program," *Journal of Marketing*, 74(5), 32–47, <http://www.journals.marketingpower.com/doi/abs/10.1509/jmkg.74.5.32>.
- Hayes, Andrew F. (2015), "An Index and Test of Linear Moderated Mediation," *Multivariate Behavioral Research*, 50(1), 1–22.
- (2013), *Introduction to Mediation, Moderation, and Conditional Process Analysis A Regression-Based Approach*, Guilford Press.
- Kallis, M J. and Dinoo J. Vanier (1985), "Consumer Shoplifting: Orientations and Deterrents," *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 13(5), 459–73.
- Krasnovsky, Therese and Robert C. Lane (1998), "Shoplifting:: A Review of the Literature," *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 3(3), 219–35.
- Kraut, Robert E. (1976), "Deterrent and Definitional Influences on Shoplifting," *Social Problems*, 23(3), 358–68.
- Maner, Jon K., C. N. DeWall, Roy F. Baumeister, and Mark Schaller (2007), "Does Social Exclusion Motivate Interpersonal Reconnection? Resolving the 'Porcupine Problem' .," *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 92(1), 42–55.
- National Learning & Resource Center (2006), "Shoplifting Statistics," <http://www.shopliftingprevention.org/whatnaspooffers/nrc/publiceducstats.htm>.
- Okada, Erica M. (2005), "Justification Effects on Consumer Choice of Hedonic and Utilitarian Goods," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 42(1), 43–53.
- Poon, Kai-Tak, Zhansheng Chen, and C N. Dewall (2013), "Feeling Entitled to More: Ostracism Increases Dishonest Behavior.," *Personality & Social Psychology Bulletin*, 39(9), 1227–39.
- Ray, JoAnn (1987), "Every Twelfth Shopper: Who Shoplifts and Why," *Social Casework*, 68(4), 234–39.
- Strahilevitz, Michal and John G. Myers (1998), "Donations to Charity as Purchase Incentives: How Well They Work May Depend on What You Are Trying to Sell," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(4), 434–46.
- Tonglet, Michele (2002), "Consumer Misbehaviour: An Exploratory Study of Shoplifting," *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 1(4), 336–54.
- Wan, Echo W., Jing Xu, and Ying Ding (2014), "To Be or Not to Be Unique? The Effect of Social Exclusion on Consumer Choice," *Journal of Consumer Research*.
- Williams, Kipling D. and Blair Jarvis (2006), "Cyberball: A Program for Use in Research on Interpersonal Ostracism and Acceptance.," *Behavior Research Methods*, 38(1), 174–80.